

Top Tips to Build Pupil Independence

This resource explores each of the seven steps you can take as a teaching assistant to help your pupils develop independence, as stated in the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)'s ['Modelling independence: The seven-step planning tool'](#).

Each step of this seven-step model may take place in a single lesson, or the steps could span over a sequence of lessons. The step by step process is designed to shift the responsibility of learning from the educator to the pupil.



1

Activate Prior Knowledge

EEF example:
'I ask pupils a series of questions about what they have learned previously that is relevant to today's learning.'

Activating prior knowledge is a great starting point for learning. At this stage, you will be able to see clear gaps in the pupil's understanding and knowledge and begin to put plans in place to support them. You can assess and activate prior knowledge through a variety of ways, such as:

- role-play or small world activities;
- discussion around a topic;
- giving them an example question to work out in maths;
- using books as a starting point.

This OneStep CPD session on [Activating Prior Knowledge](#) explores in more detail how activating prior knowledge works, and why it should be used and when, along with links to research and recommendations on the topic.



2

Explicit Strategy Instruction

EEF example:
'I talk to pupils about how they will complete the task and take them through each step as well as discussing possible strategies and how to manage their emotions.'

Discuss all possible strategies that you could use to tackle a problem, asking pupils to give examples and advice too. Go through them one at a time and discuss why each strategy would or would not be the most effective way to solve the problem. You could make a list on a whiteboard of all the strategies you think of together and cross them out to eliminate them, or you could laminate a list you have created together so they can refer to the methods they know each time they see a new problem. This conscious trial and error approach to learning is a perfect way to develop a child's metacognition and attitude to learning.

To learn more about metacognition and how you can implement it into your role, take a look at this OneStep CPD session on [Teaching Metacognitive Strategies](#).



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3

Modelling a Learned Strategy

EEF example:

'I verbalise my thought processes to pupils about the task, my choice of strategy and how I am managing my emotions.'

Show the process behind a strategy step by step and say out loud what you are doing at each stage. The example highlights modelling how to manage your emotions, which is helpful for pupils if they come across challenges when working independently later in the lesson or sequence of lessons. The growth mindset approach of 'The Power of Yet' is a great example of how to develop this approach to challenges.

These beautiful boho [Power of Yet](#) posters are a great addition to the walls of your learning area and give pupils a visual reminder that it's OK not to know the answer - yet.



You can find more about building a growth mindset learning environment with our [Growth Mindset](#) resources.



4

Memorisation of Strategy

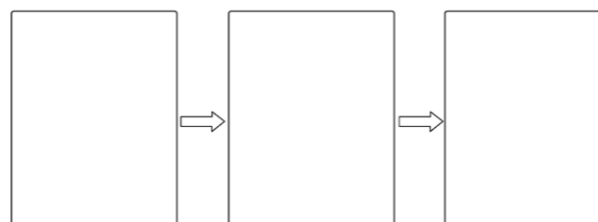
EEF example:

'I check to see what pupils have understood and that they can remember the key aspects that have been taught.'

As you model a task, ask pupils to remind you of the next step. You are still very much in control of the learning but you are checking to see if they are remembering the steps. If you identify they are not secure with the strategy or knowledge at a certain point, continue modelling.

You can use this [Sequencing Template](#) to encourage children to make notes for each step of the learning; this will help them remember the strategy so they can implement it later themselves.

Sequencing Template



5

Guided Practice

EEF example:

'Multiple opportunities are provided for pupils to practise and support is gradually removed as pupils take on more responsibility'

Move to a model where you are working together. Pupils might have their own set of equipment to solve a problem with you.

Work through it together, guiding them how to do it for themselves. As they gain confidence in the strategy, slowly remove the support you are giving them.



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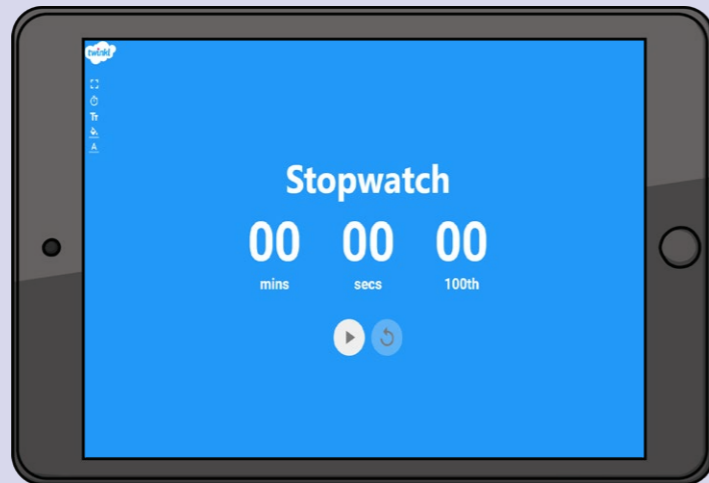
Independent Practice

EEF example:

'Pupils then complete the task by themselves without support.'

When you are fully removed from the supporting role, you can set the pupil some independent challenges to complete by themselves. Because it is independent time, this would be a good opportunity to let them have a go while you go and check in with another pupil.

You could use a visual aid like [Twinkl's Classroom Countdown](#) so the pupil has a clear understanding of the expectation of independent learning. A sand timer would work too. Let them tackle a small chunk of the task independently before going back over to check how they're doing. Over time, you can build up the time you spend away from the pupil, so their independent work time is longer.



7

Structured Reflection

EEF example:

'Pupils consider any changes they think they should make next time, whether the strategies they chose were effective and how their emotions affected their behaviour.'

When you return to the pupil, following independent work time, reflect together on how it went. Encourage your pupils to have an active role in the reflection.

There are many different ways you can encourage pupils to reflect on their learning. Why not use actions or stickers for younger learners? For older learners, our [What Went Well and Even Better If Self-Assessment Cards](#) encourage children to consider the positives and the improvements they could make next time.

Self-Assessment Cards

👍 What went well... _____

😊 Even better if... _____

Self-Assessment Cards

👍 What went well... _____

😊 Even better if... _____

Self-Assessment Cards

👍 What went well... _____

😊 Even better if... _____